

A self-guided walking tour highlighting some of the historical & architectural points of interest in the center of Downtown Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

## *A Walk around Downtown Jaffrey*

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Photo: Robert B. Stephenson

## *Introduction*

Jaffrey is unique, the only Jaffrey in the world. On August 17, 1773 a charter was granted renaming Middle Monadnock JAFFREY, in honor of George Jaffrey, a Portsmouth man of influence and a member of the Governor's Council. He never actually stepped foot in the town named for him.

For many years the village—now called Jaffrey Center—that grew up around the Meetinghouse was the town's main settlement. That started to change with the development of the water power of the Contoocook River, the opening of the Third New Hampshire Turnpike (now Route 124) and, finally, the coming of the railroad in 1870. By then Downtown Jaffrey was a bustling place of commerce and industry.

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Just the core of Downtown is featured in this pamphlet. Many nearby sites are well worth a look. Information on buildings not included here can be found in the National Register report on Downtown Jaffrey on file at the Library and the TEAMJaffrey office. Many of the places described here proudly display small oval plaques identifying them as JAFFREY LANDMARKS.

One can start this tour anywhere, although we think the logical place is the TOWN COMMON [1]. This was, and largely still is, the heart of Downtown Jaffrey. Note the two most prominent features at opposite ends: The TOWN BANDSTAND and the BUDDIES MONUMENT. The bandstand is the third one on this site. This one was built in 1880 and has had a varied history both here and elsewhere in town; it even served as a dog kennel! In 1986 it was moved back to its original location and restored. Concerts are held here during the summer. The Buddies Monument was carved on-site in 1930 by local sculptor Viggo Brandt-Erichsen and bears the names of 104 Jaffrey men who served in the First World War. Brandt-Erichsen also was responsible for the GOLD STAR MOTHERS MEMORIAL. Dedicated in 1949, it contains the names of the nine Jaffrey men who died during the Second World War. The current TOWN ELM stands at the southeast corner of the Common on the site of a far grander specimen that towered over the spot for well over a century.

Overlooking the Common on the east is the red brick mill complex generally referred to as the JAFFREY MILLS [2]. There had been a ramshackle mill or two at this spot earlier, but in 1868 when Alonzo Bascom put up this fashionable Second Empire style brick building, it must

have been seen as a milestone in the town's development. Later expansions on both sides of the river resulted in what was the town's largest industry and employer for many years. Between 1872 and 1939 more than 3,000 miles of denim cloth were manufactured. The tower is missing its top; originally there was an open cupola and steeple, while a later version resembled a Tuscan campanile.

To the north of the Common one sees a frame building which is likely Jaffrey's oldest commercial building, the WRIGHT-LACY STORE [3], better known today as the Abbott Building. This Greek Revival rambling structure, dating to 1827, was built by Captain John Wright who served in the Jaffrey Rifle Company during the Revolution. It is said that Captain Wright was one of the most popular citizens of Jaffrey but "... owing to confirmed habits of intemperance was handicapped in the influence and usefulness which his abilities merited." Next door stands the Colonial Revival JAFFREY POLICE STATION [4], built in 1954 as the Town Offices and adapted to its current use in 1996. It sits on the site of the Granite State Hotel which was constructed in 1859 and rebuilt after the fires of 1875 and 1877. The hotel was Jaffrey's most visible center of activity. When it burned again in 1923 the land was given to the town by Julius and Ada Prescott to be used for a town hall site. Also fronting on the Common is the BANK OF NEW HAMPSHIRE [5]. Much altered over the years, about all that can be seen of the original structure is the chimney. The bank, which started in 1850 as the Monadnock State Bank, had its first home across the street in the front room of treasurer Peter Upton's Italianate style house at 41 MAIN STREET [6]. Upton was influential in bringing the railroad to town and getting a post office for Factory Village, an early name for Downtown Jaffrey.

Across Goodnow Street from the bank stands the JAFFREY PUBLIC LIBRARY [7]. This handsome Romanesque Revival building opened in 1896. H. M. Francis of Fitchburg was the architect. He designed several libraries in the region including those in Rindge and Ashby. The \$12,000 cost was donated by Susan Clay, which accounts for her name over the door. The addition at the rear was dedicated in 1990. On the front lawn stands the SOLDIERS MONUMENT, a statue of a Civil War soldier, erected in 1899 to commemorate those serving in the Union Army and Navy, the Mexican War, the War of 1812 and the American Revolution.

Adjacent to the Library stands the JAFFREY CIVIC CENTER [8], a non-profit, multi-cultural organization. Designed in the Colonial Revival style, the building opened in 1966. The Center hosts numerous art shows and other public events during the year. It's also the home of the Jaffrey Historical Society which has a permanent exhibit in the basement.

Across Main Street at number 47 is the Queen Anne/Colonial Revival style **SWEENEY HOUSE [9]**. Now law offices, this was the home and office of Dr. Frederick Sweeney. His World War One journal was used by Willa Cather in her novel *One of Ours*. The well-known writer spent several summers in Jaffrey and is buried in the Old Burying Ground in Jaffrey Center.

Nearly opposite is the **EAST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH [10]** which dates to 1850. Now the United Church of Jaffrey, it was established by a group of parishioners of the First Church in the Center who desired a more conveniently located place of worship. Further west at number 75 Main Street is the **WOZMAK HOUSE [11]**, a fine example of Colonial Revival by the Massachusetts architect Walter Jacob Freethy, built in 1935 for Mrs. Arthur Poole. It looks across to the stately **JONAS MELVILLE HOUSE [12]**, one of the few stone houses in Jaffrey. When built in 1829 it was said “. . . to be the best house on the turnpike from Keene to Boston.” It is now the convent of the *Sisters of Mercy*. Note the Palladian window and the finely detailed side- and over-lights of the entry. **ST. PATRICK CHURCH [13]** is across the street and a bit west. This marvelous monument to New Hampshire fieldstone was designed by the Boston architect Frank J. Untersee and replaced a nearby framed structure in 1917. The source of the fieldstone? For several years parishioners coming to Sunday Mass brought stones in their buggies.

Turning east again and retracing our steps we eventually come to the corner of School Street. It’s hard to miss the Greek Revival **CUTLER MEMORIAL [14]**, not only because of its steeple but also the **TOWN CLOCK**. Built in 1844 for the First Universalist Society, it has been the home of the Jaffrey Woman’s Club since 1939. The clock, built by E. Howard of Boston, was installed in 1884. At the same time, the present more elaborate steeple replaced the simpler original one. The building is named for the Society’s last minister.

Before passing on, cast your eye up School Street. There’s been more than one school here over the years, starting in 1842. On the Fourth of July 1854 a grand Italianate brick two-story school was dedicated (“. . . the finest in the County. . .”). This later became known as **UNION HALL [15]**. The school bell is now displayed

on the second floor of the Civic Center. In 1893 a grade school was built next door in the Colonial Revival style, later replaced by the present brick grade school which opened in 1938.

Notice the highly ornate **JAMES LACY HOUSE [16]** at number 8 School Street; the bracketing at the eaves is a particularly Italianate touch. Next door at number 19 stands the **WALTER GOODNOW HOUSE [17]** and matching carriage house, one of the few examples of “stick style” architecture in the area. Goodnow was the founder of what grew to be a chain of 23 stores scattered throughout New England. The house probably dates to the 1890s.

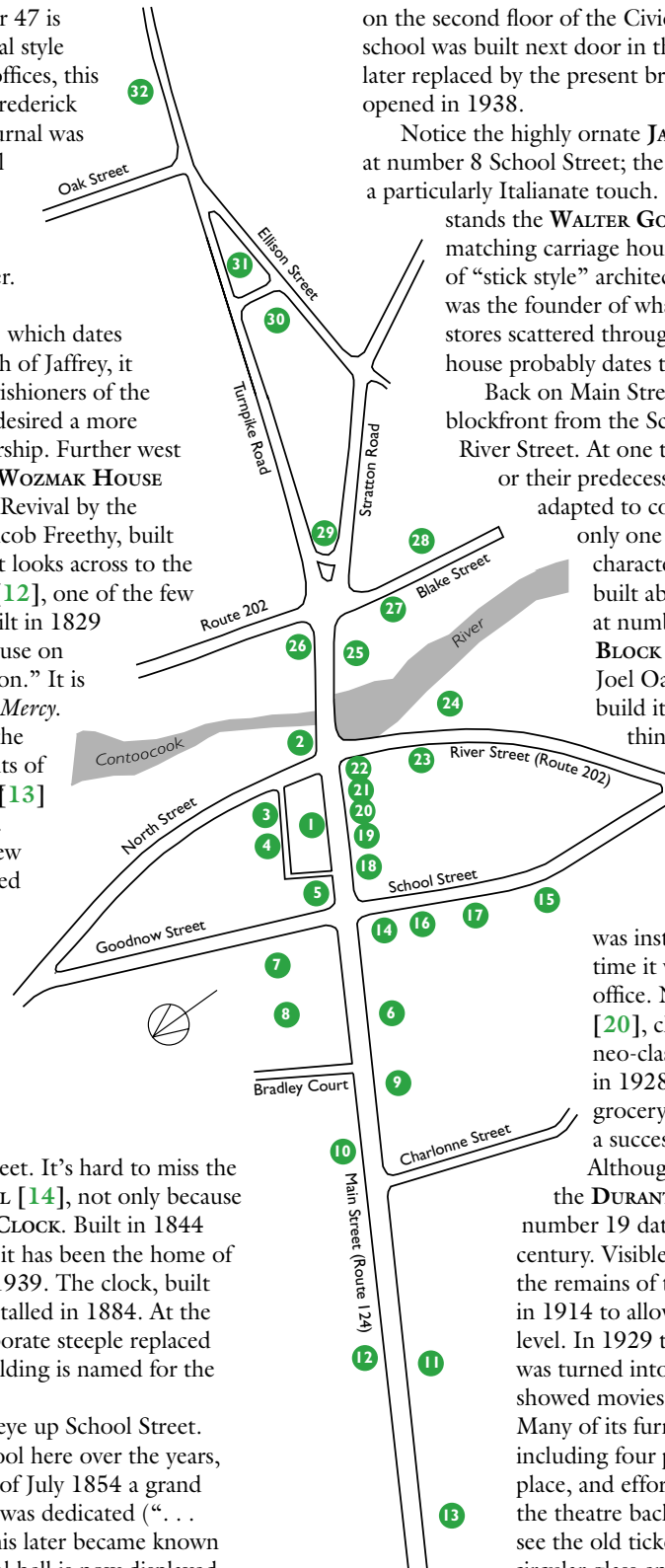
Back on Main Street, consider the entire blockfront from the School Street corner to River Street. At one time all these buildings or their predecessors were houses, later adapted to commercial use. The

only one retaining its residential character is number 25 [18], built about 1840. Its neighbor at number 23, the **COURNOYER BLOCK [19]**, was built in 1826 by Joel Oakes Patrick. He really did build it as he was skilled in such things—he was responsible

for the Meetinghouse tower—but he was a shopkeeper, too. It was at this address that in 1899 the first telephone exchange

was installed in Jaffrey. At one time it was also used as a post office. Number 21 **MAIN STREET [20]**, clearly commercial in its neo-classical design, was built in 1928 and housed the A&P grocery for many years. It has had a succession of tenants ever since.

Although not immediately obvious, the **DURANT-VANNI BLOCK [21]** at number 19 dates from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Visible above the front façade are the remains of the original house, elevated in 1914 to allow for a storefront at ground level. In 1929 the attached barn at the rear was turned into the Park Theatre which showed movies until its closing in 1972. Many of its furnishings and decorations, including four painted murals, are still in place, and efforts are underway to bring the theatre back to life again. Do you see the old ticket window and semi-circular glass entrance doors? The stucco





corner building, the **DUNCAN BLOCK** [22], replaced an earlier frame building in 1914 to serve as the new premises of George Duncan's drug store, known for many years as "Duncan the Druggist." Duncan was a prolific photographer and published many postcards featuring his photographs of Jaffrey and surrounding towns. Between 1915 and 1929 it also housed the post office.

As you cross River Street going east look to the right. The small two-story, two-bay brick building was Jaffrey's **FIRE STATION** [23] from 1932 until 1981; later it was the police station. Further along on the other side of the street is the **JAFFREY WAR MEMORIAL PARK** [24] which replaced a service station in 1984. It is dedicated to those who served in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. This pleasant setting provides a fine view of the Contoocook River and the Jaffrey Mills. Note the concrete dam and its associated spillway and mechanical controls where Main Street crosses the river. These were constructed following the 1938 hurricane, a memorable storm that caused major damage throughout the region including the destruction of the previous Main Street cofferdam and bridge.

Continuing east and adjacent to the Chamber of Commerce building, once a service station, we come upon the **BEAN BUILDING** [25]. In 1928, Vernon J. Bean saw the need for modern commercial space in the heart of Downtown and erected this somewhat neo-classical style building of yellow brick. Each storefront originally had a recessed entrance and multi-light transom windows. Some of the original features, which had been covered over, were once again revealed during renovations in the early 1990s. The post office relocated here from the Duncan Block. The town's next major new commercial building was the **DILLON BLOCK** [26], across the street, which replaced some mill-related structures in 1940. There's a touch of art deco in the architecture. The entrance retains its original paired glass and wood doors including the original push bar and transom. The main tenant until 1963 was the First National grocery which relocated here from the Bean Building.

Turn the corner onto Blake Street. The first building on the right, long a pizza restaurant, started life in 1957 as yet another location of the **POST OFFICE** [27]. Across the road stands the **JAFFREY DEPOT** [28]. The Monadnock Railroad came to Jaffrey in 1870, and soon this little section of Downtown became a busy hub of activity. About all that remains from the railroad era is the signal tower rising above the depot's east side. Passenger service to Jaffrey ceased in 1953.

Back on Main Street we see at the fork of the road the **SAUNDERS HOUSE** [29]. At this point Main Street becomes Turnpike Road, the name coming from the Third New Hampshire Turnpike which came through Jaffrey in 1803. This Greek Revival house, now a restaurant, was constructed by Joel Oakes Patrick around 1840. Its name comes from John Saunders, an early

owner.

Going east along Turnpike Road one encounters a surprising variety of both architecture—Colonial Revival, Greek Revival, American Four-Square, Queen Anne—and uses—single and multi-family housing, commerce, offices and governmental. Glance at the cupola atop the present **POST OFFICE** [30]. The weathervane once graced the Baptist Church which stood on this site from 1830 until its demolition in 1968. The large granite slab in the center of **CHARITY SQUARE** [31] is from the church's foundation. The cupola was saved and relocated to a private residence in Acton, Massachusetts, where it serves as a gazebo. And the church's granite steps were later used as the entrance monuments to the Jaffrey War Memorial Park.

The Baptist Church became associated with the Baptist Cemetery, now the **VILLAGE CEMETERY** [32], to the left on Turnpike Road just as one starts downhill. The white clapboarded hearse house marks the entrance. This least known but most centrally located of Jaffrey's cemeteries is a peaceful place to visit. The last burial was in 1935.

You have now visited some of the historical and architectural points of interest of Downtown Jaffrey. We hope you're encouraged to explore some more. 🍷 🍷

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